

the Secure Rural Schools program. In over 700 counties and 41 States, timber was once an economic engine, supporting tens of thousands of jobs while keeping critical government operations going strong in these communities that house tax-exempt Federal land.

However, in recent decades, restrictive forest management regulations, combined with devastating partisan environmental campaigns, has resulted in access to our Federal forests being cut off, blocking any economic activity opportunities.

Rural counties do not want to come to Congress every year to beg for money they should be getting to generate in their own backyards anyway. Money that should come from Federal and State land, though it may take up most of their county, now generates no economic value for them.

Reauthorizing Secure Rural Schools is very important and will provide, though not a permanent solution, at least a temporary one until we get back to the wise management of our Federal lands instead of watching them burn each fall, as we see in the news. We can't sit back and watch rural communities suffer until we wake up to that reality.

As Congress works to implement commonsense forest management policies, it is imperative we keep the Secure Rural Schools program in place so rural communities will have the funding for schools and roads that they need.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until approximately 5 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 2 o'clock and 9 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1700

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Ms. CHENEY) at 5 p.m.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will postpone further proceedings today on motions to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or on which the vote incurs objection under clause 6 of rule XX.

The House will resume proceedings on postponed questions at a later time.

VETERANS EXPANDED TRUCKING OPPORTUNITIES ACT OF 2017

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2547) to expand the Department of Veterans Affairs

medical professionals who may qualify to perform physical examinations on eligible veterans and issue medical certificates required for operation of a commercial motor vehicle, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2547

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Veterans Expanded Trucking Opportunities Act of 2017".

SEC. 2. MEDICAL CERTIFICATE FOR VETERANS OPERATING COMMERCIAL MOTOR VEHICLES.

(a) *QUALIFIED EXAMINERS.*—Section 5403(d)(2) of the FAST Act (49 U.S.C. 31149 note; 129 Stat. 1548) is amended to read as follows:

"(2) *QUALIFIED EXAMINER.*—The term "qualified examiner" means an individual who—

"(A) is employed in the Department of Veterans Affairs as an advanced practice nurse, doctor of chiropractic, doctor of medicine, doctor of osteopathy, physician assistant, or other medical professional;

"(B) is licensed, certified, or registered in a State to perform physical examinations;

"(C) is familiar with the standards for, and physical requirements of, an operator required to be medically certified under section 31149 of title 49, United States Code; and

"(D) has never, with respect to such section, been found to have acted fraudulently, including by fraudulently awarding a medical certificate."

(b) *CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.*—Section 5403 of the FAST Act (49 U.S.C. 31149 note; 129 Stat. 1548) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a)—

(A) by striking "physician-approved veteran operator," and inserting "veteran operator approved by a qualified examiner,"; and

(B) by striking "qualified physician" and inserting "qualified examiner";

(2) in subsection (b)(1)—

(A) by striking "the physician" and inserting "the examiner"; and

(B) by striking "qualified physician" and inserting "qualified examiner";

(3) in subsection (c)—

(A) by striking "qualified physicians" and inserting "qualified examiners"; and

(B) by striking "such physicians" and inserting "such examiners"; and

(4) in subsection (d)(1)—

(A) in the paragraph heading by striking "PHYSICIAN-APPROVED VETERAN OPERATOR" and inserting "VETERAN OPERATOR APPROVED BY A QUALIFIED EXAMINER"; and

(B) by striking "physician-approved veteran operator" and inserting "veteran operator approved by a qualified examiner".

(c) *RULEMAKING.*—The amendments made by this section shall be incorporated into any rulemaking proceeding related to section 5403 of the FAST Act (49 U.S.C. 31149 note; 129 Stat. 1548) that is being conducted as of the date of enactment of this Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GRAVES) and the gentleman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Missouri.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative

days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 2547, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Missouri?

There was no objection.

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, the Fixing of America's Surface Transportation Act, or the FAST Act, created a process only for doctors at the Department of Veterans Affairs to qualify to perform physical examinations on eligible veterans and then issue the medical certificates that are required in order to operate a commercial vehicle.

H.R. 2547 would expand who is eligible for the process to all VA medical professionals as long as they are authorized by the State in which they are licensed, certified, and registered to perform physical examinations and they meet other requirements.

H.R. 2547 would ensure that the list of eligible medical professionals within the VA matches the list of eligible medical professionals that can become certified under the traditional FMCSA process.

This is a bipartisan bill. It is going to ease the regulatory burdens that help create employment opportunities for our veterans.

Madam Speaker, I would urge my colleagues to support H.R. 2547, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. NORTON. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 2547. This bill is another of our efforts to help tackle the longstanding commercial driver shortage and support veterans at the same time as they transition from military to civilian life.

H.R. 2547 will ensure that all qualified medical professionals employed by the Veterans Administration can perform commercial driver physical examinations for their veteran patients.

The medical professionals that this bill addresses are already eligible to become certified medical examiners. This bill simply allows them to utilize the alternative certification process for VA-employed physicians that is currently being finalized by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

Unfortunately, the most recent available data shows that, of the 54,000 medical professionals listed on FMCSA's national registry of certified medical examiners, only 25 are employed by the VA. The online training and testing system being developed by FMCSA and the VA should help remedy this situation. This bill will allow more caregivers to use this new resource.

This bill is consistent with the intent of the FAST Act, which was the product of a strong bipartisan process here in the House of Representatives. FMCSA, in consultation with the VA,